Frank A. Sturgis Is Dead at 68; One of the 5 Watergate Burglars

MIAMI, Dec. 4 (AP) — Frank A. Sturgis, one of the five Watergate burglars whose capture brought down the Nixon Administration, died today at a hospital in Miami, where he lived. He was 68.

He died of cancer a week after he was admitted to the Veterans Affairs hospital, said his lawyer, Ellis Rubin. Doctors diagnosed lung cancer that had spread to his kidneys.

Mr. Sturgis, a staunch anti-Communist, was a member of the burglary team caught after a break-in at the offices of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate complex on June 17, 1972. They later admitted they went there to install wiretaps and scan the party's files.

At the time of his trial, he said E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former aide for the Central Intelligence Agency, had recruited him for the burglary by saying it was a mission essential to the nation's security. The mission was actually on behalf of President Richard M. Nixon's 1972 campaign fund, the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

Mr. Sturgis served 13 months of a 1- to 4-year sentence for the burglary and was released in January 1974. He was denied a pardon by President Jimmy Carter.

In 1977, he and three others involved in the break-in sued the Committee for the Re-election of the President, saying they had been misled into thinking they were acting with Government sanction. The suit was settled out of court.

"In Watergate, he claimed to his dying day that he was acting under orders of the White House," Mr. Rubin said. "He had no idea that he would be put in prison as a result."

Interviewed last year for the 20th anniversary of the botched break-in that ultimately brought Mr. Nixon's resignation, Mr. Sturgis said he thought the United States was better off for the experience.

"It really screwed up the country," he said. "But it made our government a little bit stronger."

He added, "I feel the laws that came about after Watergate didn't give the President — whether it was Nixon or anybody else — the free rein to do what a dictator would do."

A former police officer, private investigator and a marine, Mr. Sturgis, who was Cuban-American, fought alongside Fidel Castro in Cuba but later broke with him as Mr. Castro turned toward Communism. Mr. Sturgis then became a leader of PUND, a Miami paramilitary group intent on toppling Mr. Castro.

He is survived by his wife, Jan, and a daughter.